The Star

DLP under siege again

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KUALA LUMPUR: The need for non-Dual Language Programme (DLP) classes has to be justified as it has the potential of hurting youth in the long run, say teachers and parents.

This comes after MCA Youth secretary-general Saw Yee Fung revealed that full-DLP school officials have been told to include a mandatory non-DLP class in the next academic year as part of the criteria to hold the DLP.

“While there have been no official documents or directives, DLP school principals have informed us that Education Ministry officers have communicated to them that the new guidelines are to be imposed next year.

“But not all schools have the resources to open up another new class, which would lead to a DLP class being sacrificed,” she told a press conference here yesterday.

Saw added that such a sudden change will only hurt a child’s academic performance, adding that forcing students to switch to non-DLP classes will be akin to starting anew.

“Even as we push to uphold the Malay language, it should not come at the expense of the DLP,” she said after launching an online petition to maintain the status quo on guidelines for the DLP.

Centre for Vernacular School Excellence director Arun Dorasamy demanded the ministry explain the urgent need for non-DLP classes to be implemented.

He called on the ministry to be transparent and clear on what they hope to achieve through the move instead of “trying to pass along unofficial instructions to schools discreetly without consulting the parents”.

“We need to know where the ministry got the idea or data showing that Malay language proficiency is low enough to justify this sudden move.

“It must also explain why DLP schools are being targeted, as in order to hold DLP classes, these schools must already meet the criteria of having their students’ Bahasa Melayu average proficiency be above the national average,” he said.

British Graduate Association Malaysia treasurer S. Meyyappa Manickam said the move will only hurt the country’s international growth potential in the future.

“We are already in the midst of a significant unemployment issue among graduates due to their lack of proficiency in English, making it hard for them to find jobs in major companies.

“If we begin cutting programmes like the DLP now, how are we supposed to cater to multinational corporations and foreign investors as we strive to become a future regional hub?” he said.

SJK (T) Vivekananda Parent-Teacher Association chairman Vicknesan Ayapan called on the ministry to hold proper discussions with relevant stakeholders instead of solely depending on recent academic statistics.

“Students were already known as the lost Covid-19 generation and forced to study online for over two years, so it’s expected that their results or proficiency would not be as good as before, but to base everything on such an anomalous statistical pool would be unfair.

“We should instead be looking at how to make the DLP better instead of making cuts,” he said.

Parent Action Group for Education Malaysia (PAGE) honorary secretary Tunku Munawirah Putra said the new criteria is antithetical to giving parents the right to choose the type of education for their children.

“The preference of a few parents cannot be used to justify an entire class of students being forced into non-DLP classes.

“If that is the case, then the reverse must also be done in ensuring all schools across the nation have at least one DLP class for those who prefer to have the programme,” she said.

In 2016, some 300 schools were included in the DLP pilot project which gave them the option to teach Science and Mathematics in English, and parents were given the freedom to enrol their children in the programme, or not.

Aimed at improving students’ employability and ability to compete globally, the programme was one of the initiatives under the Upholding the Malay Language and Strengthening the English Language (better known by its Malay abbreviation MBMMBI) policy.

Currently, in order to qualify for the DLP, schools must fulfil criteria set by the ministry, which includes having enough resources, having a plan to ensure the programme is sustainable, parents’ consent, and meeting the minimum Bahasa Melayu requirement.

There are currently 2,420 DLP schools – 1,613 primary and 807 secondary – in the country.

On Nov 28, Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek, in response to a question raised by Ayer Itam MP Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong in Parliament, said there were no changes to the DLP guidelines and requirements as claimed.

However, she said that all schools must have at least one non-DLP class next year, in a bid to uphold the importance of Bahasa Malaysia as the national language.